

TSP EXPRESS

*A report for certified Technical Service Providers
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NRCS has developed Not-to-Exceed rates for about 170 conservation practices, including the enhancement of wildlife habitat (above).

Determining Not-To-Exceed Rates

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) uses its Technical Assistance Cost for Conservation Practice (TACCP) database to develop its Not-to-Exceed rates for technical service providers. The TACCP database contains estimates

for time required for each skill necessary to complete the tasks of planning, design, installation and checkout associated with each conservation practice.

The time by skill estimates are then applied to an NRCS staff cost per hour, plus overhead, for each needed discipline, to derive

the estimates of the total technical assistance cost for a typically sized practice task. The NTE rate for a specific task is derived by dividing that total task costs by the reported typical job size (in acres, feet or animal units). The current TACCP includes personnel salary and benefits by disciplines, in addition to an overhead of about 26 percent for the associated personnel cost incurred from field office to the state office level.

The rates are based on typically sized conservation practice jobs within 214 time team regions (TTRs) nationwide. Each typically sized conservation practice job reflects the natural resource, regulatory, social and economic conditions that exist within each TTR. NTE rates are established for each of the four major conservation practice tasks, namely planning, design, installation and checkout. NRCS has established NTE rates for most of the 160-170 conservation practices used by the agency.

NRCS is updating its NTE rates and expects to complete its update by this summer. NTE rates can be found at <http://www.tsp-nte.nrcs.usda.gov/index.html>.

Implementing the Conservation Security Program

The Natural Resources Conservation Service recently announced that it would use a watershed approach to the new Conservation Security Program (CSP) when producer sign-ups begin this summer. CSP is the latest program in an arsenal of conservation tools designed to support and encourage voluntary conservation practices by private landowners across the nation. Authorized in the 2002 Farm Bill, CSP will identify and reward those farmers and ranchers who are meeting the highest standards of conservation and environmental management on their operations.

According to Chief Bruce I. Knight, the watershed approach is a common sense strategy for the smooth implementation of the program. "Focusing on high priority watersheds will allow NRCS to reduce the administrative burden on applicants, and to reduce the technical assistance costs of processing a large number of applications that cannot be funded."

“The watershed approach will allow landowners to assess the resources on their farms and ranches now and prepare early for participation in the program as their watersheds rotate into the program,” he said. “To do so, producers can select from a portfolio of USDA conservation programs to make the necessary natural resource improvements on their operations,” he said.

While many have expressed concern about funding for CSP this fiscal year, Knight urges TSPs and producers to remember that this is just the first year of a long-term program. “Over seven years the administration is committing \$13.4 billion in funding toward CSP—\$2 billion more than the latest Congressional Budget Office ten-year score,” he said.

“With this level of funding, we expect to enroll more than 90,000 contracts into CSP in seven years. This will undoubtedly supply the program with the foundation it needs to ‘reward the best and motivate the rest’ toward our collective goal of achieving exemplary stewardship,” Knight said.

Statements of Work Can Guide TSPs

Statements of Work soon will become available in states to help technical service providers provide quality technical services to producers. NRCS completed national templates that each state is responsible for adapting to better assist TSPs.

These Statements of Work outline deliverables for each conservation practice as well as for comprehensive nutrient management plan development, conservation planning, and cultural resources compliance activities.

NRCS recently completed 160 National Templates for Statements of Work. NRCS State Offices will adapt these Statements of Work to accompany each conservation practice or technical service used in their respective states. These Statements of Work will define the minimum specific products or deliverables for technical services provided by a certified or authorized person.

The State-specific Statements of Work, located in Section Four of the electronic Field Office Technical Guide, are available for use by technical service providers and others who plan and install conservation practices or carry out cultural resource compliance activities. The electronic Field Office Technical Guide is located on the NRCS web site at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/efotg/>. Please contact your state TSP coordinator for more information about that state's Statements of Work. State TSP coordinators can be found at <http://techreg.usda.gov/RptStateContact4Admin.aspx>.

Protecting Cultural Resources

Technical Service Providers must protect cultural resources as they provide technical services to producers. TSPs must comply with the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) as they conduct conservation project and program planning and implementation.

NRCS' National Cultural Resources Procedures Handbook helps TSPs handle cultural resources using approved procedures. The handbook offers procedures and guidance on processes to identify, evaluate and protect cultural resources, including historic properties, to comply with NHPA requirements.

TSPs can find valuable information about cultural resources in the National Cultural Procedures Handbook, including the following:

- Applications of NRCS assistance to undertakings with the potential to affect eligible cultural resources under the National Register of Historic Places;
- Compliance with selected sections of the NHPA and related authorities;
- Implementation of related compliance procedures; and
- Standards and criteria used for cultural resource compliance.

The National Cultural Resources Procedures Handbook can be found at <http://policy.nrcs.usda.gov>. Click on Handbooks and scroll to Title 190, National Cultural Resources Procedures Handbook. Government-wide policy on cultural resources can be found in Section 106 of the statute.

Grants and Agreements Training

NRCS held grants and agreements training for employees and non-government organizations in Louisiana April 26-30, 2004. Participants attended classroom presentations and reviewed new and revised handbooks on cooperative agreements, grants and contribution agreements. Questions and answer sessions ensured a uniform understanding of NRCS' authorities and policies, and procedures for competing agreements.

TSPs can view the Grants and Cooperative Agreements handbook at http://policy.nrcs.usda.gov/scripts/lpsiis.dll/H/H_120_600_Content.htm and the Contribution Agreements handbook at http://policy.nrcs.usda.gov/scripts/lpsiis.dll/H/H_120_610_Content.htm. These resources are particularly useful in understanding NRCS' procedures for establishing working relationships with TSP certifying organizations.

Training Opportunities

NRCS will hold a summit in St. Louis June 23-25, 2004 to coordinate training for certified and prospective TSPs. The National Employee Development Center (NEDC) will lead this effort. The summit's goal is to design a plan to guide the development of TSP training materials and processes. NEDC is responsible for NRCS' training.

This summit is designed for organizations, companies, agencies and institutions interested in training TSPs. Topics slated for discussion include proficiency requirements, existing training opportunities, and needed training.

Room reservations must be made by May 28, 2004. For more information about the workshop, please contact NEDC Executive Assistant Carolyn Emmert at 817-509-3242; NEDC Director Charles Adams at 817-509-3241; or National Agronomist Charles Lander at 202-690-0249.

Training Opportunities Calendar

June 23-25, 2004

NRCS Summit for Trainers of Technical Service Providers
St. Louis, Missouri

July 24-28, 2004

Soil and Water Conservation Society
St. Paul, Minnesota
Theme: "Headwaters of Conservation"

Training opportunities will be available through workshops on numerous topics, including Wind Erosion Prediction System, RUSLE 2, conservation planning field technology and Comprehensive Nutrient Management Planning. The conference also will feature conservation tours and symposia.

For conference information, please visit the SWCS web site at <http://www.swcs.org> or the Minnesota SWCS chapter web site at www.minnesotaswcs.org.



Technical Service Providers in Wisconsin learn about the TSP process.

FIELD FOCUS – WISCONSIN

What are the responsibilities of a TSP? How can the Natural Resources Conservation Service in Wisconsin help TSPs maximize opportunities available through Farm Bill programs?

NRCS staff answered these and many other questions during a one-day orientation session designed for new and prospective TSPs recently. Entitled "Orientation to Wisconsin NRCS", the training session attracted about 180 participants, the majority of whom were certified or pending TSPs from the private sector. NRCS developed

the day-long course to help TSPs understand the myriad responsibilities of becoming a TSP and to make them aware of the numerous resources available through NRCS.

The morning session covered diverse topics such as training opportunities for TSPs, field office responsibilities, field office operations with TSPs, quality assurance reviews, reporting requirements, Not-to-Exceed rates; and opportunities for TSPs through Farm Bill Programs. During the afternoon, participants selected either the agronomic or engineering track for breakout sessions. Agronomic topics included nutrient management and pest management plan development, conservation plan development, Comprehensive Nutrient Management Planning, required practice supporting documentation and quality assurance review. Engineering topics included NRCS engineering requirements, required practice supporting documentation, quality assurance reviews and spot checks and local NRCS contacts.

Evaluations showed that the workshop was right on target, with the overwhelming consensus among the TSPs that this workshop was much needed to provide guidance and answer questions. A workshop highlight was an on-line demonstration of the websites that TSPs will need to use most frequently.

For More Information

For more information on technical service providers, visit the TechReg site at <http://techreg.usda.gov>; write to Technical Service Provider Group, Conservation Engineering Division, USDA-NRCS, P.O. Box 2890, Washington, D.C. 20013; or send an e-mail to tspg@nrcs.usda.gov.

State Technical Service Provider Contacts

<http://techreg.usda.gov/RptStateContact4Admin.aspx>

Your Feedback is Needed

This is the third issue of TSP Express, a report for certified TSPs. We are seeking topics for future issues. Please send comments to tspg@nrcs.usda.gov.

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